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KING DIDERIK  
AND THE FIGHT BETWEEN THE  
LION AND DRAGON

AND OTHER BALLADS

BY  
GEORGE BORROW

LONDON :  
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## KING DIDERIK AND THE LION'S FIGHT WITH THE DRAGON

FROM Bern rode forth King Diderik,  
A stately warrior form ;  
Engaged in fray he found in the way  
A lion and laidly worm.\*

They fought for a day, they fought for two,  
But ere the third was flown,  
The worm outfought the beast, and brought  
To earth the lion down.

Then cried the lion in his need  
When he the warrior saw :  
“ O aid me quick, King Diderik,  
To 'scape the Dragon's claw.

\* Dragon.

"O aid me quick, King Diderik,  
For the mighty God thou fearest ;  
A lion save for the lion brave,  
Which on thy shield thou bearest.

"Come to my rescue, thou noble King,  
Help, help me for thy name ;  
Upon thy targe I stand at large,  
Glittering like a flame."

Long, long stood he, King Diderik,  
Deep musing thereupon ;  
At length he cried : "Whate'er betide  
I'll help thee, noble one."

It was Sir King Diderik,  
His good sword bare he made :  
With courage fraught, the worm he fought,  
'Till blood tinged all the blade.

The gallant lord would not delay  
So fast his blows he dealt ;  
He hacked and gored until his sword  
Was sundered at the hilt.

The Lindworm took him upon her back,  
The horse beneath her tongue ;  
To her mountain den she hurried then  
To her eleven young.

The horse she cast before her young,  
The man in a nook she throws :  
“ Assuage your greed upon the steed,  
But I will to repose.

“ I pray ye feed upon the steed,  
At present no more I can ;  
When I upleap, refreshed, from sleep,  
We'll feast upon the man.”

It was Sir King Diderik,  
In the hill he searched around ;  
Then, helped by the Lord, the famous sword  
Called Adelring he found.

Aye there he found so sharp a sword,  
And a knife with a golden heft :  
“ King Sigfred be God's grace with thee,  
For here thy life was reft !

"I've been with thee in many a fight,  
In many an inroad too,  
But that thy doom had been in this tomb  
I never, never knew."

It was Sir King Diderik,  
Would prove the faulchion's might ;  
He hewed upon the flinty stone  
'Till all around was light.

It was the youngest Lindworm saw  
The sparks the hill illumine :  
"Who dares awake the fiery snake  
In her own sleeping room ?"

The Lindworm gnashed its teeth with rage,  
Its grinning fangs it show'd :  
"Who dares awake the mother snake  
Within her own abode ?"

Then spake the other little ones,  
From the dark nooks of the hill :  
"If from her sleep the old one leap,  
'Twill fare with thee but ill."

Then answered Sir King Diderik,

His eyes with fury gleam :

"I will awake your mother snake

With chilly, chilly dream.

"Your mother she King Sigfred slew,

A man of noble line ;

I'll on ye all avenge his fall

With this good hand of mine."

And then awaked the Lindworm old,

And on her fell such fear :

"Who thus with riot disturbs my quiet ?

What noise is this I hear ?"

Then said King Diderik : "'Tis I,

And this have I to say :

O'er hill and dale, 'neath thy crooked tail,

Thou brought'st me yesterday."

"O hew me not, King Diderik,

I'll give thee all my hoard ;

'Twere best that we good friends should be,

So cast away thy sword."

"I pay no trust to thy false device,  
    Befool me thou wouldst fain ;  
Full many hast thou destroyed ere now,  
    Thou never shalt again."

"Hear me, Sir King Diderik,  
    Forbear to do me ill,  
And thee I'll guide to thy plighted bride,  
    She's hidden in the hill.

"Above by my head, King Diderik,  
    Is hung the little key ;  
Below by my feet to the maiden sweet  
    Descend thou fearlessly."

"Above by thy head, thou serpent curst,  
    To begin I now intend ;  
Below by thy feet, as is full meet,  
    I soon shall make an end."

Then first the laidly worm he slew,  
    And then her young he smote ;  
But in vain did he try from the mountain to fly,  
    For tongues of snakes thrust out.

So then with toil in the rocky soil  
    He dug a trench profound,  
That in the flood of serpent blood  
    And bane he might not be drowned.

Then bann'd the good King Diderik,  
    On the lion he wroth became :  
"Bann'd, bann'd," said he, "may the lion be,  
    Confusion be his and shame."

"With subtle thought the brute has brought  
    On me this grievous risk ;  
Which I ne'er had seen had he not been  
    Graved on my buckler's disc."

And when the gallant lion heard  
    The King bewail his hap :  
"Stand fast, good lord," the lion roared,  
    "While with my claws I scrap."

The lion scrapp'd, King Diderik hewed,  
    Bright sparks the gloom relieved ;  
Unless the beast had the knight released  
    He'd soon to death have grieved.

So when he had slain the laidly worm,  
And her offspring all had kill'd ;  
Escaped the knight to the morning light,  
With heavy cuirass and shield.

And when he had now come out of the hill  
For his gallant courser he sighed ;  
With reason good he trust him could,  
For they had each other tried.

“ O there's no need to bewail the steed,  
Which thou, Sir King, hast miss'd ;  
I am thy friend, my back ascend,  
And ride where'er thou list.”

So he rode o'er the deepest dales,  
And o'er the verdant meads ;  
The knight he rode, the lion strode,  
Through the dim forest glades.

The lion and King Diderik  
Together thenceforth remain ;  
Each death had braved, and the other saved  
From peril sore and pain



Where'er King Diderik rode in the fields  
The lion beside him sped ;  
When on the ground the knight sat down  
In his bosom he laid his head.

Wherefore they call him the lion knight  
With fame that name he bore ;  
Their love so great did ne'er abate  
Until their dying hour.

## DIDERIK AND OLGER THE DANE

WITH his eighteen brothers Diderik stark  
Dwells in the hills of Bern ;  
And each I wot twelve sons has got,  
For manly feats they yearn.

He has twelve sisters, each of them  
A dozen sons can show ;  
Thirteen the youngest, gallant lads,  
Of fear who nothing know.

To stand before the King a crowd  
Of giant bodies move ;  
I say to ye forsooth their heads  
O'ertopped the beechen grove.

“ With knights of pride we war have plied  
For many, many a year ;  
Of Olger, who in Denmark reigns,  
Such mighty things we hear.

“ Men talk so fain of Olger Dane  
Who dwells in Jutland’s fields ;  
Crowned is his head with gold so red,  
No tribute us he yields.”

Then Swerting took a mace, and shook  
That mace right furiously :  
“ From ten times ten of Olger’s men  
I would not look to flee ! ”

“ Hark, Swerting, hark, of visage dark,  
Esteem them not so little ;  
I’d have thee ken that Olger’s men  
Are knights of gallant mettle.

“ They feel no fright for faulchions,  
For arrows no dismay ;  
The desperate fight is their delight,  
They deem it children’s play.”

Then cried the mighty man of Bern,  
When pondered long had he :  
“ To Denmark we will wend, and learn  
At home if Olger be.”

They took their route from Berner land,  
They eighteen thousand were ;  
King Olger good they visit would,  
And to Denmark all repair.

A messenger by Diderik sent  
To Danish Olger goes :  
“ Say, will ye tribute pay to us,  
Or with us bandy blows ? ”

Then full of wrath King Olger grew,  
Such speech he could not bear :  
“ Let Diderik meet us on the wold,  
We'll battle with him there.

“ Tribute to pay each Dane would scorn,  
He's wont himself to take it ;  
Our tribute ye will like but ill,  
If ye come here to seek it.”

His kemps then gathering in a ring  
The news to them he told :  
“ Bern’s haughty lord has sent us word  
That he’ll have tribute-gold.

“ He’ll either tribute have, or hold  
With us a bloody feud ;  
But the first King he will not be  
We have this year subdued.”

Then cried in scorn a kempion good,  
King Diderik’s envoy to :  
“ To waste our home if Berners come  
They all hence out won’t go.”

Soon as the news he heard, full glad  
Was Ulf Van Yern, and gay ;  
Then laughed outright bold Hogen knight :  
“ Too long do they delay ”

It was Vidrik Verlandson,  
High beat with joy his heart ;  
Then said amain Orm Ungerswayne :  
“ To meet them let us start.”

“The first man I’ll be in the van,”  
     Sir Ivor Blue he cried :  
 “Nor shall ye say that I was last,”  
     Sir Kulden Gray replied.

King Olger on the verdant wold  
     With Diderik battle join’d ;  
 To fight they went, no jest they meant,  
     So wroth were they in mind.

Endured for three long days the fray,  
     And flinch would neither side ;  
 To help his lord each Dane his sword  
     In desperation plied.

Down ran the blood, like raging flood  
     Which ’neath steep hills doth pour ;  
 Then tribute they were forced to pay  
     Who tribute asked before.

Rose in the sky the blood-reek high,  
     And dimmed the lustrous sun ;  
 ’Twas sad to spy the brave men lie  
     So thick the earth upon.

In gore lay thick both men and steeds,  
Dear friends were parted there ;  
All did not laugh the feast who sought,  
Too hot they found the fare.

Now tamer grown, the Berner Jutt  
Thought thus himself within :  
“ Of us a hundred scarce remain,  
We cannot hope to win.”

Then took he to his heels and ran,  
Not often back looked he ;  
To say good night forgot Swerting quite,  
For Bern, for Bern they flee.

Then Diderik turned him with a shout  
That shook the vaulted skies :  
“ Bern, Bern’s the place for us, I guess,  
For here no refuge lies ! ”

Then answered 'neath the green hill’s side  
The son of Verland keen :  
“ Ye and your host will little boast  
Ye have in Denmark been.”

Full eighteen thousand knights were they  
    When out they marched from Bern ;  
Wounded and worn but seventy-five  
    With drooping crests, return.



## OLGER THE DANE AND BURMAN

BURMAN in the mountain holds,  
    Makes his shield shine brightly there ;  
A message he sends to Iceland's King,  
    For he has a daughter fair.

“ Hear, good King of Iceland, hear,  
    Hear what now I say to thee :  
Give to me thy daughter fair,  
    And divide thy land with me.

“ Either yield thy daughter fair,  
    And divide with me thy land,  
Or the warrior good prepare  
    Who in fight can me withstand.”

“ I have daughter none but one,  
    Damsel Gloriant her they call ;  
To King Carvel she's betrothed,  
    And in him my trust is all.

“ I have given her to a King  
    And King Carvel hight is he ;  
If he fail to defend the maid,  
    Then thy booty she shall be.”

'Twas the King of Iceland good,  
    To his daughter's bower he goes ;  
And the Damsel Gloriant  
    To receive him gently rose.

“ Hear, all dearest daughter mine,  
    For I bring thee tidings new ;  
Burman in the mountain holds,  
    He would win thee and doth woo.

“ Burman is a kempion dour,  
    And of jesting nought he knows ;  
He will surely have thee soon,  
    If no warrior him oppose.”

It was Damsel Gloriant,  
Silent would no longer stand :  
“ In our tower a prisoner is  
Who will Burman take in hand.”

It was Damsel Gloriant,  
Her blue mantle o'er her threw ;  
Swiftly to the prison tower,  
Where the prisoners lay she flew.

It was Damsel Gloriant,  
'Bove the prisoners all she cried :  
“ Hear thou, Olger good, the Dane,  
Have thy legs yet power to stride ?

“ Art thou living, Olger Dane ?  
I have something to impart ;  
There is a trolld for me that lusts,  
And that trolld is Burman swart.

“ I'll not wed the filthy guest,  
I'm betrothed to Christian knight ;  
I to thee will subject be  
If thou conquer him in fight.”

“ Here I’ve lain for fifteen years,  
All in chains and bondage hard ;  
Blessings on thee, Gloriant,  
That to me thou hast repaired.

“ Here for fifteen years I’ve lain,  
Borne fierce hunger-pangs, and thirst;  
I’m not able now to wage  
Fight as I was able erst.”

“ Hear thou me, good Olger Dane,  
Save me from my peril, save ;  
Ere I take the ugly troid  
I would fling me in my grave.

“ Burman is fierce, his horse is wild  
I to thee will tell forsooth,  
I have heard and been assured  
That he bites with wolfish tooth.

“ Nothing, nothing will he eat  
But the flesh of Christian men ;  
And nothing, nothing, will he drink  
But human blood mixt up with bane.”

“Thy father means a gallant man,  
King Carvel to share thy bed ;  
Can he not hold thee from the trolld,  
That thou unto me hast sped ?

“Blessings on thee, Gloriant,  
That thou didst upon me think,  
With Burman I will break a lance  
If thou give me good meat and drink.

“Canst thou procure my horse again,  
My good sword and hauberk tried ?  
Then for thy sake it will be,  
I a course with him will ride.

“Carvel is my stall-brother true,  
To his ears 'twill doubtless come ;  
Rather would I lose my life  
Than the fiend should bear thee home.”

“The best food which thou shalt choose  
I for thee will straight provide ;  
And I will give thee thy steed again,  
Which thou lovest best to ride.

“I will give thee the strongest sword  
E'er that armed a warrior's side ;  
Give thee too a faulchion hard,  
Well thereon thou may'st confide.”

Olger from the tower they took,  
Garments for him have they wrought ;  
They sat him highest at the board,  
And rich meats for him they brought.

Burman riding came to court,  
Thought to bear the maid away ;  
Olger the Dane against him rode,  
And soon found him rougher play.

For two days they stoutly fought,  
As the third towards evening drew  
Down upon a stone they sat,  
They their strength would there renew.

Then the valiant Burman kemp,  
To the Danish Olger said :  
“Quarter I will grant, if thou  
Wilt believe in Mahommed.”

Little could brook that, Olger the Dane,  
On his foe fierce looks he bent :  
“ When thou dwell in blackest hell  
Say by Olger thou wast sent.”

Up then leapt the kempions twain,  
’Gainst each other rode anew ;  
Then asunder went their helms,  
And afar their faulchions flew.

They fought so long, they fought so hard,  
That their strength was well-nigh flown ;  
Slain at length was Burman Kemp,  
Dead to earth fell Burman down.

Olger to the Damsel rode :  
“ Thou mayst take thy plighted knight,  
For I have with my good sword  
Slain the foul and poisonous sprite.”

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